

SENSE AMPLIFIER

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

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Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a sense amplifier, and more particularly, to a sense amplifier having an equalizer.

10 Background of the Related Art

In general, data stored at the memory cell are read out by means of a sense amplifier. Referring to FIG. 1, the operation of the conventional sense amplifier used in NOR type flash memories will be described.

A plurality of sense blocks 30 are connected to the bit lines (not shown), 15 respectively. The sense amplifier 30 includes a sensing unit 10 for sensing data of the memory cell. The output SAIN of the sensing unit 10 is inputted to a non-inverting + terminal of a comparator SAO. The output SAINR of a reference voltage generator 20 having a reference cell is inputted to an inverting - terminal of the comparator SAO. For example, if the output 20 SAIN of the sensing unit 10 is higher than the output SAINR of the reference voltage generator 20, the comparator SAO outputs a Low signal. On the contrary, if the output SAIN of the sensing unit 10 is lower than the output SAINR of the reference voltage generator 20, the comparator SAO output a High signal. In other words, if the memory cell is a program cell, the

comparator **SAO** outputs a Low signal since the threshold voltage of the reference cell is lower than the threshold voltage of the memory cell. Meanwhile, if the memory cell is an erase cell, the comparator **SAO** outputs a High signal since the threshold voltage of the reference cell is higher than the
5 threshold voltage of the memory cell.

FIG. 2 is a detailed circuit diagram of the sense amplifier shown in FIG.
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If a word line **W/L** is enabled and a bit line select signal **YSEL** and a program bar signal **PGMb** becomes a High level, transistors **N7** and **N6** are turned on. Also, if the sense enable bar signal **SAENb** is a Low level, a transistor **P1** is turned on. For example, if the memory cell is a program cell, a transistor **N5** is turned off since the output of an inverter **INV3** becomes a Low level. Accordingly, as the power supply is outputted via the transistors **P1** and **N4**, the output of the sensing unit **10** becomes a High level. The
15 output of the comparator **SAO** is outputted via the inverters **INV1** and **INV2**.

Meanwhile, if the word line **W/L** is enabled, a reference bit line select signal **RYSEL** becomes a High level and the reference program bar signal **RPGMb** becomes a High level, the transistors **N2** and **N3** are turned on. Also, if the sense enable bar signal **SAENb** is a Low level, the transistor **P0** is turned on. As the reference cell is a program cell, the output of the inverter **INV0** becomes the Low level and the transistor **N1** is thus turned off. Accordingly, voltages dropped at the transistors **P0** and **N0** are outputted
SAINR.

For example, if the output of the sensing unit **10** is higher than the

output **SAINR** of the reference voltage generator **20**, the comparator **SAO** outputs a Low signal. On the contrary, if the output of the sensing unit **10** is lower than the output **SAINR** of the reference voltage generator **20**, the comparator **SAO** outputs a High signal. In other words, if the memory cell is
5 a program cell, the comparator **SAO** outputs the Low signal since the threshold voltage of the reference cell is lower than the threshold voltage of the memory cell. If the memory cell is an erase cell, the comparator **SAO** outputs the High signal since the threshold voltage of the reference cell is higher than the threshold voltage of the memory cell. At this time, the output
10 of the comparator **SAO** is outputted via the inverters **INV1** and **INV2**.

The above operation of the sense amplifier is well illustrated in the timing diagram of FIG. 3. If an address transition signal **ATD** occurs as a result of sensing variations in the address during the periods **T0** and **T1** of FIG. 3, a voltage for read the word line is generated and then applied to the word lines. As it is required that a high word line voltage be generated at a low voltage operation, the word line voltage starts to increase with delayed time. However, the sense amplifier will be enabled at **T1** if transition of the address occurs. As the word line voltage is not sufficiently raised, however, the outputs **SAIN** and **SAINR** are increased up to the **T2** period. After this time
15 period, as the reference cell is turned on and current thus flows, an adequate sensing operation occurs at **T3** period. At this time, the output **SAINR** is rapidly increased since the load of the output **SAINR** is relatively lower than that of the output **SAIN**. Accordingly, time delay occurs until the sensing data is outputted after the word line turned on the memory cell and the
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reference cell. In other words, time when the output **SAINR** drops to the reference voltage, for example in case of a program cell, time when the output **SAIN** is raised after the bit line is charged makes the sensing speed slow.

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Accordingly, the present invention is contrived to substantially obviate one or more problems due to limitations and disadvantages of the related art, and an object of the present invention is to provide a sense amplifier capable of improving the sensing speed, by which the output of a reference voltage generator and the output of a sensing unit are made same before a reference cell and a memory cell are turned on, and the sensing operation is then performed.

The sense amplifier according to the present invention is characterized in that it comprises a sensing unit for sensing data stored at a memory cell, a reference voltage generator having a reference cell, for generating a reference voltage, an equalizer that makes same the output of the sensing unit and the output of the reference voltage generator, before a word line of the memory cell is enabled, and is then disabled, and a comparator for comparing the output of the sensing unit and the output of the reference voltage generator.

Additional advantages, objects, and features of the invention will be set forth in part in the description which follows and in part will become apparent to those having ordinary skill in the art upon examination of the following or may be learned from practice of the invention. The objectives and other advantages of the invention may be realized and attained by the structure

particularly pointed out in the written description and claims hereof as well as the appended drawings.

In another aspect of the present invention, it is to be understood that both the foregoing general description and the following detailed description of the present invention are exemplary and explanatory and are intended to provide further explanation of the invention as claimed.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The above and other objects, features and advantages of the present invention will be apparent from the following detailed description of the preferred embodiments of the invention in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIG. 1 illustrates a conventional sense amplifier,

FIG. 2 is a detailed circuit diagram of the sense amplifier shown in FIG. 15 1,

FIG. 3 is a timing diagram for explaining the operation of the sense amplifier shown in FIG. 2,

FIG. 4 illustrates a sense amplifier according to the present invention,

FIG. 5 is a timing diagram for explaining the operation of the sense 20 amplifier shown in FIG. 4, and

FIG. 6A through FIG. 6C are embodiments of the equalizer shown in FIG. 4.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED

EMBODIMENT

Reference will now be made in detail to the preferred embodiments of the present invention, examples of which are illustrated in the accompanying drawings, in which like reference numerals are used to identify the same or
5 similar parts.

FIG. 4 illustrates a sense amplifier according to the present invention.

Referring to FIG. 4, it can be seen that the sense amplifier of the present invention has the same construction to the conventional sense amplifier shown in FIG. 1, except that the sense amplifier comprises an equalizer **40** provided between the output of the reference voltage generator and the output of the sensing unit and the equalizer **40** is also enabled by an equalizer enable signal
10 **EQUAEN**.

How the sense amplifier of the present invention is operated will be below described in detail.

15 The equalizer **40** is enabled by the equalizer enable signal **EQUAEN** before a read voltage is applied to the word line (not shown), in order to make same the output **SAIN** of the sensing unit **10** and the output **SAINR** of the reference voltage generator **20**. Thereafter, if the word line is enabled, the output **SAIN** of the sensing unit **10** is inputted to the non-inverting + terminal
20 of the comparator **SAO**. The output **SAINR** of the reference voltage generator **20** having the reference cell is also inputted to the inverting - terminal of the comparator **SAO**. For example, if the output of the sensing unit **10** is higher than the output **SAINR** of the reference voltage generator **20**, the comparator **SAO** outputs a Low signal. On the contrary, if the output of

the sensing unit **10** is lower than the output **SAINR** of the reference voltage generator **20**, the comparator **SAO** outputs a High signal. In other words, if the memory cell is a program cell, the comparator **SAO** outputs the Low signal since the threshold voltage of the reference cell is lower than the threshold voltage of the memory cell. On the contrary, if the memory cell is an erase cell, the comparator **SAO** outputs the High signal since the threshold voltage of the reference cell is higher than the threshold voltage of the memory cell.

The above operation of the sense amplifier is well illustrated in the timing diagram of FIG. 5.

As can be seen from FIG. 5, the equalizer **40** is driven at **T1** and **T2** periods and the outputs **SAIN** and **SAINR** are raised with the same voltage. Further, if the equalizer is disabled at **T2**, the outputs **SAIN** and **SAINR** have a prescribed voltage, respectively, by means of the voltages of the word lines. If the memory cell is a program cell, the output **SAIN** is raised. If the memory cell is an erase cell, the output **SAIN** is dropped. If the difference in the voltage between the outputs **SAIN** and **SAINR** occurs, the sensing data is outputted from the comparator **SAO**. Accordingly, there is no time delay during **T3** unlike from the existing sense amplifier. Due to this, it is possible to improve the sensing speed.

FIG. 6A through FIG. 6C are embodiments of the equalizer shown in FIG. 4.

FIG. 6A illustrates the equalizer that is constructed using a simple switch, FIG. 6B illustrates the equalizer that is constructed using a PMOS transistor **Q1** and FIG. 6C illustrates the equalizer that is constructed using an

NMOS transistor **Q2**.

As mentioned above, the present invention has an advantageous effect that it can improve the sensing speed by adopting the equalizer to the sense amplifier.

5 The forgoing embodiments are merely exemplary and are not to be construed as limiting the present invention. The present teachings can be readily applied to other types of apparatuses. The description of the present invention is intended to be illustrative, and not to limit the scope of the claims. Many alternatives, modifications, and variations will be apparent to those
10 skilled in the art.